

**BATTLE CREEK CITY PLANNING COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES
Wednesday, December 18, 2013**

1. Call to Order:

Chairman Preston Hicks called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m.

2. Attendance:

Members Present:

Susan Baldwin	Jan Frantz	Dean Newsome
Steve Barker	John Godfrey	Chip Spranger
Dan Buscher	Preston Hicks	John Stetler

Members Excused: All Present

Staff Present: Christine Hilton, Planning Supervisor
Jill Steele, City Attorney
Glenn Perian, Senior Planner
Leona Parrish, Administrative Assistant, Planning Dept.

3. Additions or Deletions to the Agenda: None

4. Approval of Minutes: Meeting Minutes of October 23, 2013.

**MOTION WAS MADE BY COMMISSIONER GODFREY, SUPPORTED BY
COMMISSIONER FRANTZ, TO APPROVE THE PLANNING COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES FOR OCTOBER 23, 2013 AS PRESENTED.**

VOTE ON MOTION: ALL IN FAVOR; NONE OPPOSED; MOTION CARRIED.

5. Correspondence: None

Commissioner Hicks Opened the Public Hearing

6. Public Hearings and Deliberation/Recommendations:

- A. Parks and Recreation Draft Master Plan 2014-2018; Mr. Ted Dearing, Business Manager, Parks & Recreation:** The Parks and Recreation Master Plan will be the strategic guideline for establishing recreation programs and services for the next five-years.

Chairperson Commissioner Hicks reviewed the meeting guidelines for the Public Hearing and asked the petitioner to come forward to speak.

Mr. Ted Dearing, Business Manager stated Mr. Jeff Hovarter, Director and Mr. Kevin Smith from Parks and Recreation were here today to present the Parks and Recreation Master Plan. Mr. Dearing stated the Master Plan serves as their strategic guide for developing programs and services for the department based on citizen wants and needs. Said the plan is required by the State of Michigan in order for them to access certain grant funds and other State resources and this plan is prepared every five-years. Stated the process is an extensive citizen driven process that features a statistically valid

needs assessment survey of the community with a youth component as well and also includes a public input and public review period and then formal approval of this body and the City Commission. Said the plan covers a five-year period from 2014-2018 and includes a number of specific action items that they hope to accomplish during that five-year period. Stated they had done a different approach with this plan with focusing less on specific action steps and more on broader strategic objectives and believes it gives more flexibility in their approach and will be better in the next five years to respond to changes in citizen needs as well as resources available to the department. Mr. Dearing said the plan continues to focus on community health, which is a top priority based on what they continue to hear community wide and the number of partners who are working on this effort. They have received citizen feedback for a needs assessment and the plan has three broad strategic objectives: (1) Improvements to the physical recreation environment infrastructure to the parks, linear path and building facilities; (2) Initiating and maintaining programming and facility partnerships much like the one they have at the boys and girls clubs at Full Blast; (3) Creating opportunities for self-directed recreation which is a new trend given their history and programming. Said the plan includes a number of goals and objectives and specific action steps that are tied back to these strategic directives and includes a listing of capital projects that are tied to their strategic approach as well. Mr. Dearing said they have continued to emphasize youth and youth programming and will seek to create more self-directed recreation opportunities across all age categories and are confident this plan meets the citizens' needs and overall quality of life.

With no others wishing to speak, Commissioner Hicks closed the public hearing.

MOTION BY COMMISSIONER GODFREY, SUPPORTED BY COMMISSIONER SPRANGER TO APPROVE THE PARKS AND RECREATION 2014-2018 DRAFT MASTER PLAN AS PRESENTED.

Discussion:

Commissioner Buscher stated the Parks & Recreation report was very informative asked for more information regarding the third objective being self-directive information; noted page #78 it seems the percentage identify with the Parks & Recreation indicated that 35% of our people do not know exactly what is done or the type of services. Mr. Dearing said that is a great question and that the number one barriers they see is when they survey individuals on whether or not they use the Parks and Recreation services and typically what they often learn is because of a lack of information or what is happening and what types of services are being offered. Said they have put a lot of emphasis on their marketing in the past few years and have redone their web-site in order to engage more with citizens with the opportunities to maintain physical infrastructure is what people want because they like to have access to their local parks as they wish.

Commissioner Godfrey congratulated Parks and Recreation for their report submitted as it was enjoyable to read and asked how to engage social media and with the Parks and Recreation mission. Mr. Ted Dearing stated social media allows them an opportunity to engage people and allow them to drive the process. Said they can program dates and times or create awareness such as the Disc Golf Facility at the Leila Arboretum for the public and create that awareness to share the information.

Commissioner Hicks asked if Parks & Recreation was on-line with citizens keeping the parks clean. Mr. Dearing said community groups have stepped-up to help with the parks and to also help develop and maintain the parks, he feels it has been a success.

Commissioner Hicks asked if there was a volunteer management group to keep it on-going. Mr. Dearing stated they do not have a formal one at this point and have tried to engage in a few efforts recently with the Community Foundation; they are continually working on formalizing a strategy to do so.

Commissioner Hicks stated he received a report regarding the health and wellness of Calhoun County and wondered if there was a public health correlation with what is available from the Parks and Recreation and/or if this can be done. Mr. Dearing stated they have found in the past few years there is a significant correlation between Parks and Recreation infrastructure and the public health and have worked with the two partnering with each other.

Commissioner Frantz made reference to page 67 of the report and if the intent was to improve access; she sees the new locations and a list of intended projects and is a part of the intention behind this to improve access. Mr. Dearing said the overall plan is to create greater access.

Commissioner Frantz asked if they are in proximity to where people live. Mr. Dearing stated he feels they are meeting that criteria with our cities land base and focus on safe and maintained parks, with more of what the condition is of the facilities and if the access to those facilities safe.

Commissioner Newsome asked if based on the strategic focus and combined with the usage rates, participation rates, focus groups and the budget; what kind of trade-offs do they see between today's programs and being able to implement future strategies. Mr. Dearing stated because of limited resources to centralize their activities; example Bailey Park, they have partnered with other parks and need to balance resources and other activities for better community outreach.

Commissioner Newsome asked if they were going to leverage consolidating operations and more partnerships in order to be able to continue to do what they are doing plus expand their focus. Mr. Dearing stated they are going to have to use partnerships in order to extend their reach and have found they can provide just so much service with the resources they have and centralize locations and that through outreach with partnerships created they can provide much more service in a dispersed manner through-out the community by going with the partnership route.

Mr. Jeff Hovarter, Parks and Recreation Director stated self-directed participation answers the question given the lack of growth in budgets in the various city departments they need to continually move forward and is a challenge all over the county. Said the idea of when they look statistically at the way persons choose to participate and attempt to get healthy tends to be on their terms, their time, and their place and if they are going to be successful with the health indicators that are not so good in Calhoun County, they are going to have to recognize that it is less costly and is not necessarily direct programming which is what most parks and recreation departments have seen as their focus over the last 50 or 60 years and are better off taking those limited resources and putting more and not all into up-keeping of parks, improving access to parks and creating a scenario where people on their terms can go out on the linear path and choose to walk which is the most popular activity year after year. Stated on every survey they have done that persons prefer to walk and they want safe walking paths, or persons like to swim and want access to water; therefore the strategy is to do it on the public's terms.

Commissioner Godfrey noted that 10 or 12 years ago Parks & Recreation had focused on regional larger parks in the city and was kind of blind-sided by a large group of citizens in the demand for rejuvenating Hamilton Park. Asked if they have seen that type of citizen interest groups focus upon our

neighborhood parks. Mr. Ted Dearing said it has come out in the last two plans where people are very interested in their local neighborhood park.

Commissioner Stetler asked regarding cost and if there were not any replacement dollars and how it is reflected in the budget. Mr. Dearing said they have it included in the grants and plans for the overall cost and maintenance of the equipment. Said park maintenance plan is on-going and are addressing those needs by strategies that would allow them to both advocate increased dollars for park maintenance and then ensure it is there for long term maintenance.

Commissioner Stetler asked regarding the monies spent on Capital Equipment in the past and how much had been spent. Mr. Dearing said very little as it has been grant funded.

Commissioner Stetler asked regarding cost for equipment like mowers and asked if it was in their expense account. Mr. Jeff Hovarter said yes, 5 million was in the parks operation budget that does include mowing green-space and 2 million of that is from tax payer's bill; which has not increased in a long period of time and have flat lined for almost eight-years and the cost for gas, fertilizer, etc. has increased; therefore they have reduced the service level they provide and mow and remove trash less to off-set the increase in the cost in the recent years. Said they do look for citizen support groups to help with the parks as long as those groups energy lasts with helping.

Commissioner Hicks asked if kayaks and canoes are on the radar for the Battle Creek area. Mr. Hovarter stated yes, it is always on the radar and they have talked together with the County regarding the resources available for the kayaks and canoes; in particular there is a parcel of land that is owned by the County that is off of Columbia Avenue. Stated there is a private citizen, Mr. Doug Grosso who might partner at Bailey Park on the Battle Creek River and are looking at opportunities needing to be multi-jurisdictional for it to work.

Commissioner Godfrey asked regarding the issue of canoes/kayaks in addition to monies; if Enbridge and the oil situation have been a major factor in developing anything on the Kalamazoo River over the past three years. Mr. Jeff Hovarter stated they had asked and not received multiple times. Said they offered some properties that have little or no value and have not offered any monies; said it was all gone. Mr. Hovarter said Enbridge has used areas along the linear path and were responsive with the repair work on the damage done while using those areas.

Commissioner Baldwin asked how is it known how much the linear path has been used; said it is a large expense in the budget to maintain. Mr. Hovarter stated if you watch the linear path areas use, you can see it is being used as persons like to walk. Said the Bailey Park loop area is used by the Y-Center and have walk groups that utilize the path and also the Riverside Park is highly used which has become a destination park for people from Athens and Marshall areas; which is communicated by their social media that is received and public open meetings held. Said the information he has received also show the park on Helmer Road is also highly used. Mr. Ted Dearing stated the Kellogg Foundation granted monies to Kalamazoo County to study some trail related issues which included counts on our Battle Creek linear path and has that information available to anyone who wishes to review.

Commissioner Baldwin stated the numbers show it is one-million dollars along the I-94 corridor and \$520,000 dollars from the middle school to Westlake. Mr. Ted Dearing stated that area would be a very expensive project and the good news is monies was received for the Capital Improvement Bond issue recently to repair a significant portion of the Linear Path which is expensive; noted the numbers

and information received indicate that if they were to invest their monies that the Linear Path is where they would have the greatest impact.

Commissioner Baldwin said she understands regarding the walking; but feels more signage is needed, also share with persons the information showing the calories, miles or kilometers, etc. used. Mr. Jeff Hovarter stated they struggle to keep in stock the marketing information for the Linear Park brochure for businesses such as the City's Visitors Bureau, Neighborhood Welcoming Committees, Board of Realtors, Battle Creek Unlimited, etc. that ask for cases at a time; which provides information such as mileage and marker information. Mr. Hovarter stated the linear path is expensive to build but is not expensive to maintain, so as they have been moving forward in the past few years and will continue to plan for funding.

Commissioner Baldwin stated the City Commission will be asking if the Linear Path is really being used. Mr. Hovarter stated a study had been done in Battle Creek that show there is a health crisis in this area and when asked about their family; people are in denial.

Commissioner Jan Frantz noted she was thrilled to see there are new dog parks and at her park (Woodland Park) volunteers put grocery bags into a tube to pick-up after the dogs. Said that in the winter the people on Riverside do not take care of picking up after their dogs and asked who is responsible to ensure or enforce that they do pick-up after their animals as it is a public health issue. Mr. Ted Dearing stated it has been an on-going problem as persons steal the bags; they will do their due diligence to be prepared to address those issues as they do not want to discourage walkers.

Commissioner Hicks asked Commissioners for a Vote.

VOTE ON MOTION: ALL IN FAVOR; NONE OPPOSED; MOTION CARRIED.

7. Old Business: None

8. New Business: Commissioner Godfrey welcomed City Commissioner Dean Newsome to the Planning Commission. Stated he feels the Planning Commission is a fun and challenging commission as he will see things being laid out for the City of Battle Creek and being a City Commissioner will get to hear the petitions presented twice. Commissioner Newsome stated as a strategic planner by profession he is very interested in where the city is going and how it looks over the horizon.

9. Comments by the Public: None

10. Comments by the Staff and Commission Members: Ms. Hilton wanted to share that regrettably Commissioner Jan Frantz submitted her resignation from the Planning Commission and thanked her for her years of service to the Planning Commission. Said her input has been very valuable and have enjoyed working with her and wish her well in the future, also appreciate that we can still work with her through Battle Creek Unlimited. Ms. Frantz stated absolutely and that it has been a pleasure and a privilege for her to serve on this commission and that after 16 years, she feels it is time to pass the hat and maybe mentor someone instead of carrying on. Commissioner Hicks noted it has been many years and asked everyone to applauded Ms. Frantz and wish her well.

Ms. Hilton asked the Planning Commission if they would like to hold a joint workshop with the City Commission for the Capital Improvement Plan as they had in the past few years. The Planning Commissioners all stated yes, they would like to hold a joint workshop.

11. **Adjournment:** The meeting was adjourned at 4:50 P.M.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Christine M. Hilton".

Respectfully Submitted: Christine M. Hilton, AICP., Exec. Secretary, Planning Commission